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History

"Everybody, no matter how poor, dreams of a better life and will fight for it, if given the opportunity."

~ Mildred Robbins Leet, Co-Founder & Board Chair Emerita

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(Mildred Robbins Leet, Co-Founder & Board Chair Emerita, pictured third from left)

Trickle Up was founded in 1979 at a time when "trickle down" economics was the conventional wisdom. The economic philosophy of the time was that if you invest in business at the highest level of society, the benefits would eventually trickle down to the rest of the population. Even foreign aid distribution, for all its good intentions, operated from the same perspective. Yet we watched the poor getting poorer while the rich benefited from this approach. It wasn't working, and communities around the world were suffering as a result. When Trickle Up founders Glen and Mildred Robbins Leet traveled to one of the Caribbean's poorest nations, Dominica, they saw firsthand that huge sums of money allocated to top levels of society never reached the world's poorest.

So, Glen and Mildred gave ten people grants of \$100 each to launch their own microenterprises. The Leets provided them with business plans and reports to track their business expenses and earnings. New business activities ranged from building blocks to selling eggs, jams and school uniforms. The Leets knew from their experience that nothing empowers an individual to achieve their dreams more than the trust and encouragement of another human being.

Together, the Leets had come up with a model. They would provide very poor women and men with seed funding in the form of a small grant and basic training on how to grow the business - supplemented in recent years by introducing savings groups to help people build capital. They would put into practice what their experience had taught them over and over again: Investing in individuals at the grassroots level is the most powerful antidote to extreme poverty.

Trickle Up was among a small number of pioneering nonprofits that embraced these radical new ideas for addressing poverty. Poor people, even those with little money or education, could be the architects of their own economic progress. They could be trusted to handle money, whether grants or loans, responsibly and effectively. Importantly, women could be a powerful force for economic development. This approach of helping individuals directly is now widely accepted.

Over thirty years later, the Trickle Up program continues to be a critical vehicle for poor people's social and financial empowerment.

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